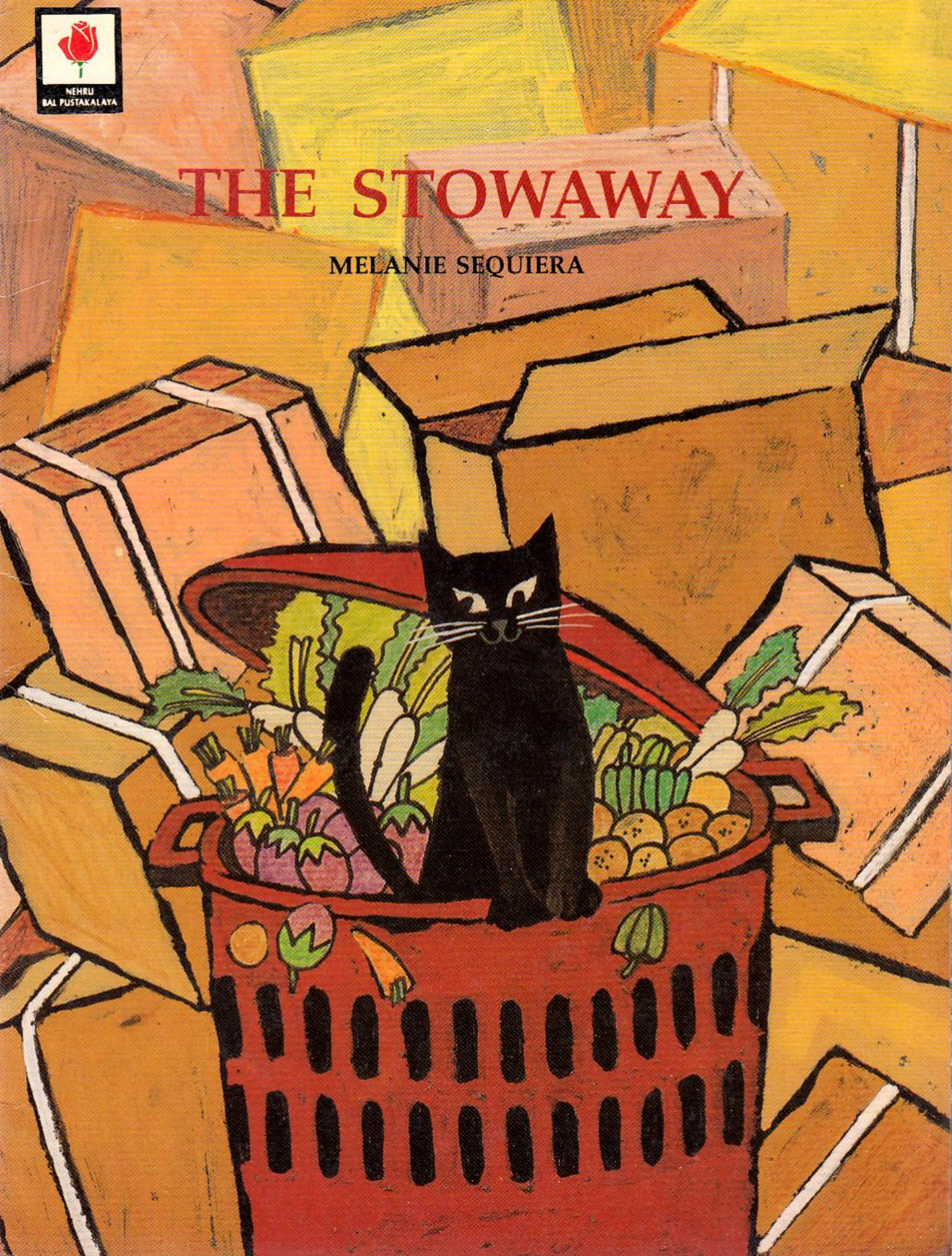


THE STOWAWAY

MELANIE SEQUIERA



Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

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MELANIE SEQUIERA

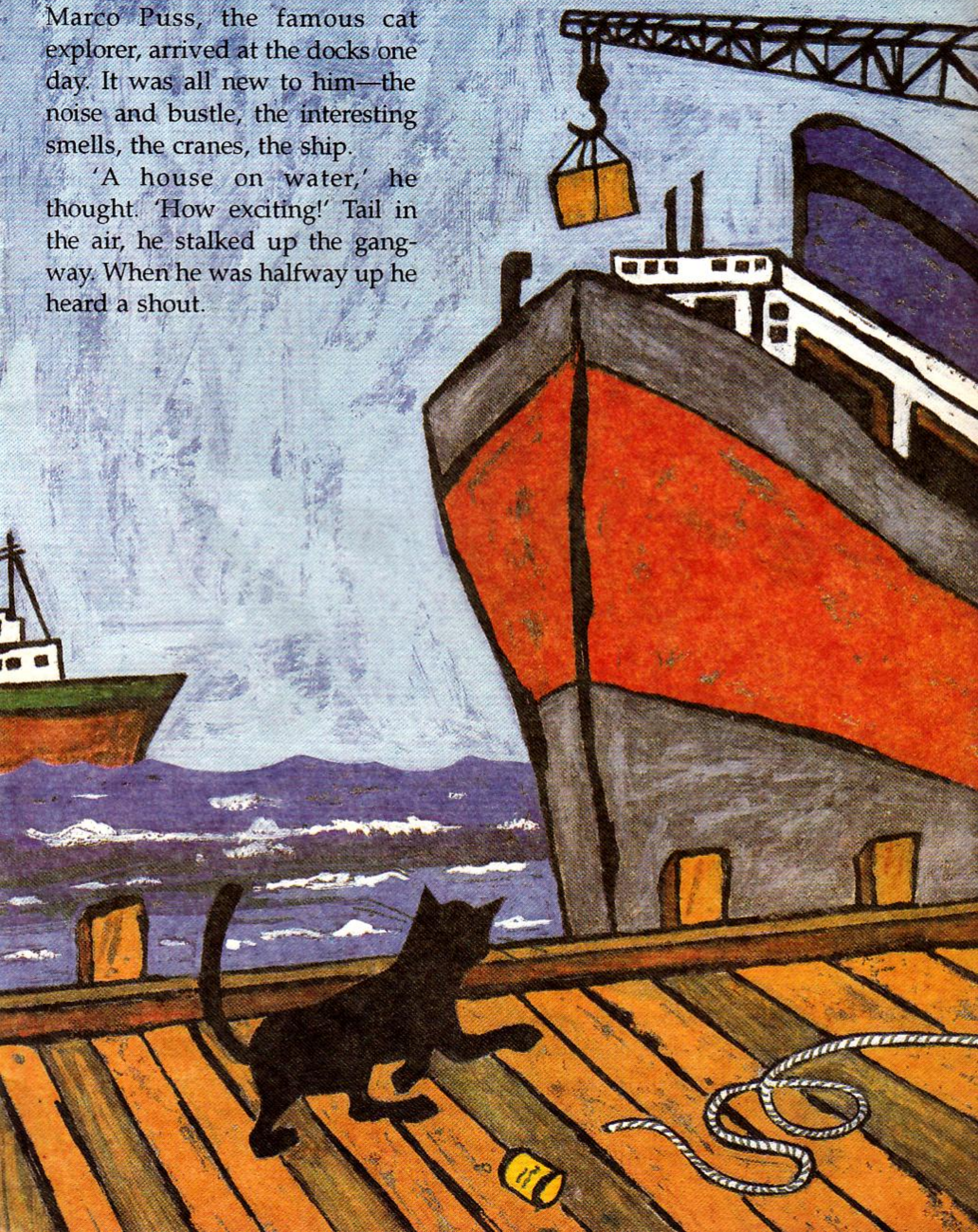
Illustrator
HARINDER SINGH



NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

Marco Puss, the famous cat explorer, arrived at the docks one day. It was all new to him—the noise and bustle, the interesting smells, the cranes, the ship.

‘A house on water,’ he thought. ‘How exciting!’ Tail in the air, he stalked up the gangway. When he was halfway up he heard a shout.





'Whose cat is that? Get him off the ship!'
Marco was booted off the ship. His dignity was hurt.
'I'll get on that ship somehow or my name is not Marco
Puss!' he vowed.



A big basket lay nearby along with other baggage. Creeping inside, Marco curled up under the cover. Soon a man came along and picked up the basket. Marco was carried up the gangway and down a companionway till they reached the ship's galley. There the basket was set down.



'Here you are, Cook,' said a voice. 'The food-stuff you ordered.'

Marco tensed, and waited. The cover was lifted. He caught a glimpse of the cook's plump face gaping at him and then he sprang out and led through the doorway. Behind him came shouts as others joined the cook in the chase. The noise brought Captain on the scene.

'What's all this hullabaloo about?' he asked angrily. 'Cook! Why are you running about with a rolling pin?'

Cook explained, his voice coming in indignant gasps, 'It was in the basket, sir! A dirty black cat! It leapt out at me!'

'Dirty indeed!' fumed Marco in his hiding place, giving his glossy coat a quick lick.



'We can't wait for him to be found,' said Captain. 'All hands to their posts. If you come across the cat, just throw it overboard.'

Cook, kind at heart, now felt sorry that he had made a fuss. 'Let him be, Captain,' he said. 'They're good mousers, cats are, and if there is one thing I'm mortally afraid of, it's mice!'

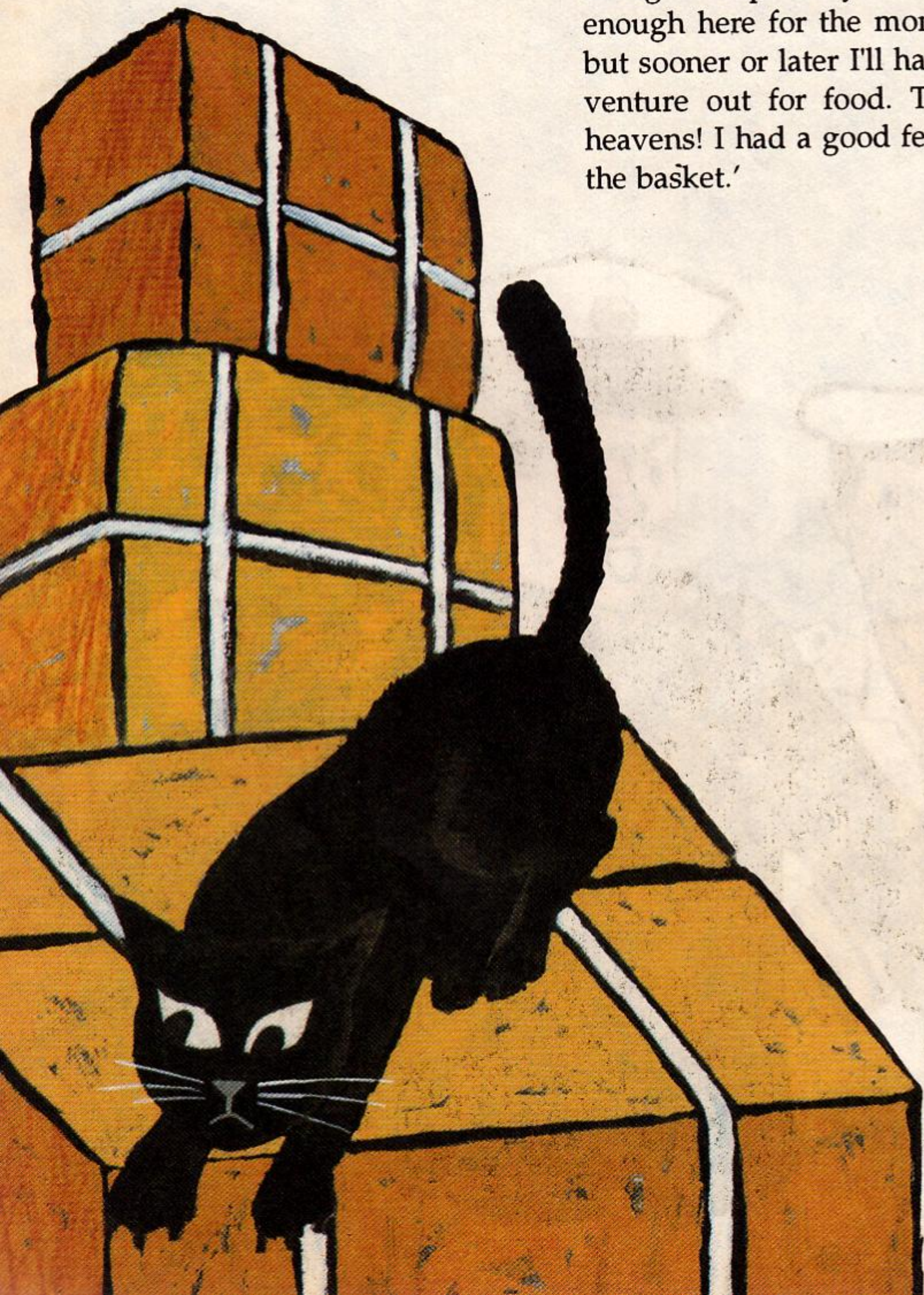


And a sailor put in timidly, 'It's good to have a cat on board, sir. They bring good luck.'

'Pah!' said Captain. 'Not a black cat. Black cats always bring bad luck and I won't have one on my ship. When you find him, drown him!'



How Marco trembled at the words! His fur stood on end and he hardly dared to breathe! 'What am I to do?' he thought desperately. 'I'm safe enough here for the moment, but sooner or later I'll have to venture out for food. Thank heavens! I had a good feed in the basket.'



There was a slight sound behind him. Turning around quickly, he pounced. 'Ah, a rat!' he exclaimed, eyeing the cowering little creature. 'I don't eat rats as a rule, but I guess you'll come in handy on a really hungry day.'

'Please, sir,' it squeaked, 'I am a Miss!'

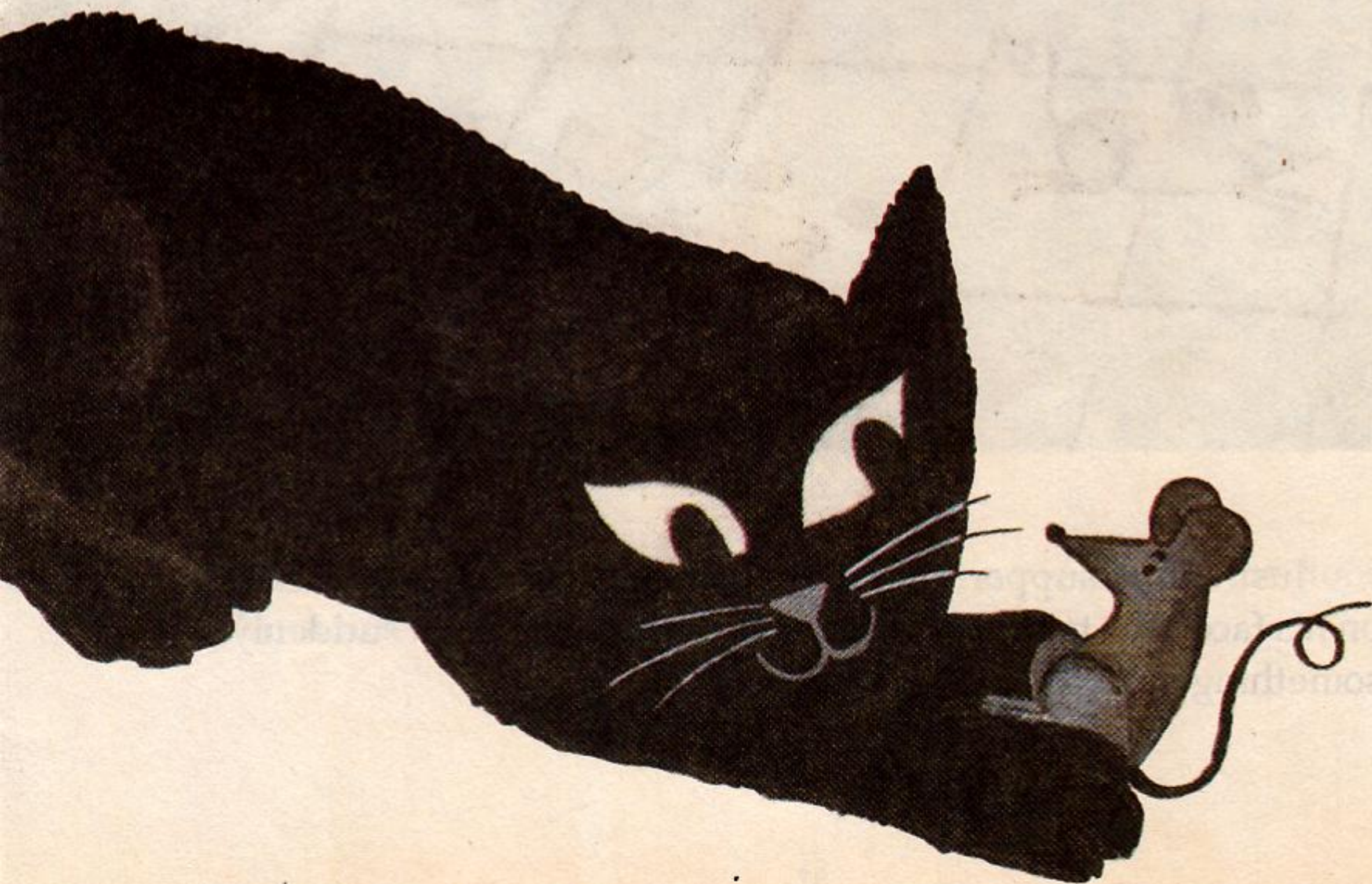
Suddenly a marvellous idea struck Marco. His blue eyes began to shine. 'You wouldn't like me to gobble you up now, would you, Miss Mousie?' he asked threateningly.

'Oh no, sir!' cried the mouse fervently.

Settling the mouse comfortably between his paws, Marco explained, 'I'm going to let you go, Mousie—but first you'll have to promise to do me a little favour.'

'Anything, sir, anything!' promised the mouse.

'All right then, listen carefully. . .'





Just before supper-time that evening, Cook, a proud beam on his face, was taking a huge pie from the oven when suddenly something streaked between his feet.



'A mouse!' he screamed, dropping the pie all over the floor.
'A mouse in my kitchen! Help! Help!'

Captain came hurrying into the galley, followed by the stewards. He found Cook standing on top of the table, shrieking over and over again. 'Mouse! Help! I knew that cat should have been allowed to run free,' he sobbed hysterically. 'It would have caught the nasty creature.'

'Nonsense!' said Captain. 'We do not need a cat to catch a mouse. Set the traps!'

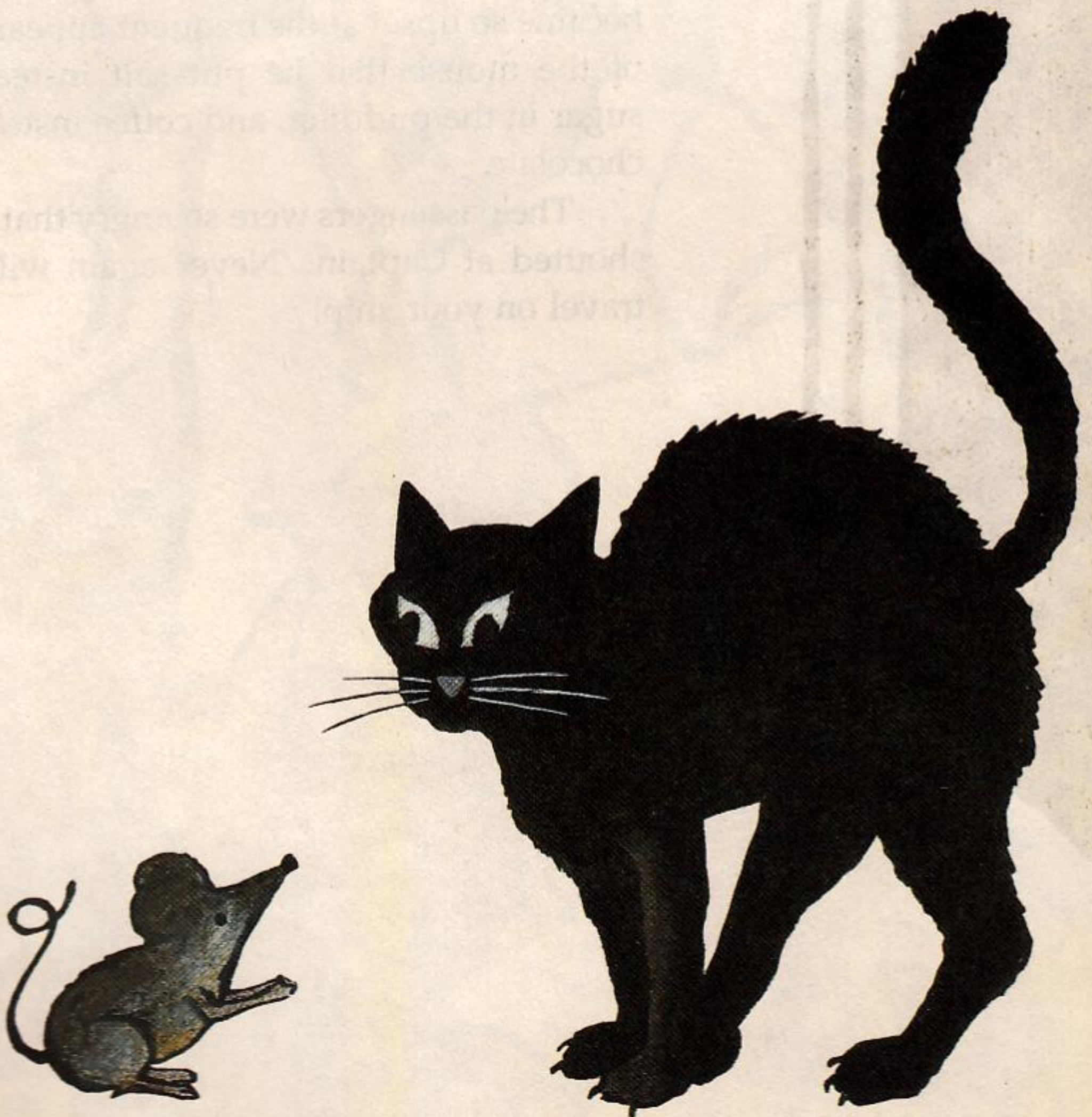


In their hiding place, Marco shook with laughter. 'Well done, little mouse!' he said. 'Tomorrow at lunchtime, I'll send you out again. Now listen. They are going to set cheese traps for you. You are not to go near the cheese, do you hear?'

The mouse looked sulky. 'I like cheese,' she said crossly.

'Very well, then. I will eat you,' said Marco, baring his teeth. 'For if you go near the trap they'll get you and you'll be killed anyway!'

The mouse backed away hurriedly. 'I won't go near the trap. I promise!' she squeaked.



The illustration on the left side of the page depicts a brown door with a silver handle. A white cat is shown in silhouette, walking along the bottom edge of the door. The cat's shadow is cast onto the floor, which is a light beige color. The cat is facing right, and its shadow is also cast to the right, slightly behind it.

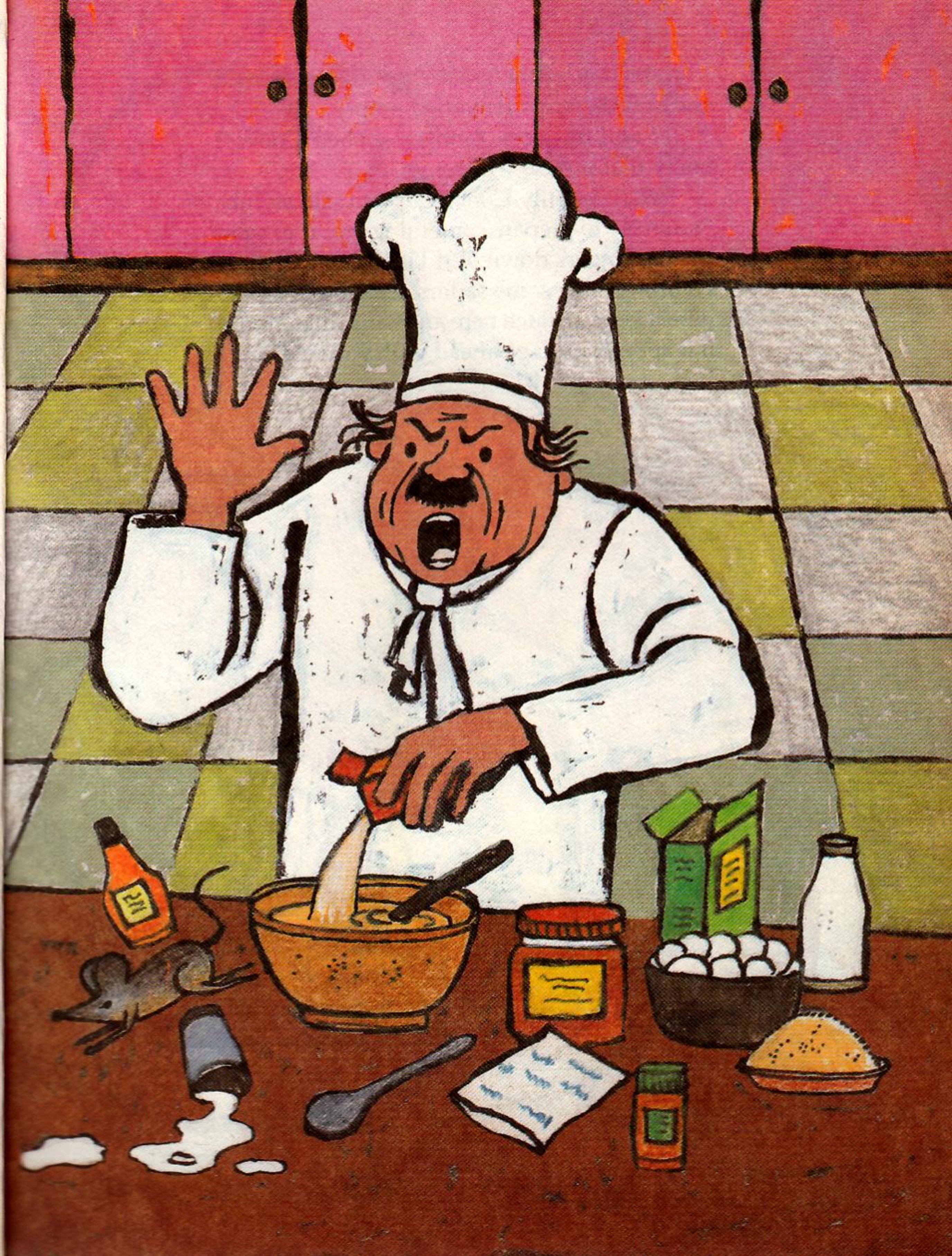
The next morning Cook was mixing a cake when suddenly the mouse ran across the table. She was gone in a trice, but not before Cook had dropped the box of baking powder into the bowl. When the cake was put in the oven it swelled and swelled and ran all over the place. How Cook cried!

Captain was angry and worried.

'This won't do, Cook,' he scolded. 'For two days running, the meals have been spoilt. The passengers are complaining.'

The next day was even worse. Cook became so upset at the frequent appearance of the mouse that he put salt instead of sugar in the pudding, and coffee instead of chocolate.

The passengers were so angry that they shouted at Captain: 'Never again will we travel on your ship!'



The day of the great ship dinner arrived and still the traps remained empty.

'I will not cook dinner!' sobbed Cook. 'I know that mouse will come!'

'Don't be silly, Cook,' Captain said sternly. 'You have to prepare something grand to calm the passengers down. But I'll tell you what. . . I'll bring along some sailors armed with sticks who'll keep a watch here and catch that mouse if it appears. You go ahead with your cooking.'







'You heard that?' whispered Mousie, terrified. 'They'll be waiting for me with sticks!'

'Then, now's the time to go,' decided Marco, 'while Cook is setting out the ingredients and Captain is collecting his men.'

Swiftly the mouse moved. Like lightning it streaked through the door, ran up the leg of a table and grabbed a piece of toast. Captain arrived in the doorway in time to see the mouse jump on Cook's neck as he was bending down into a shelf. With a shout of 'Hoi!' Captain rushed forward, but the mouse had reached the hatchway safely.

Poor Cook leapt up with a scream and banged his head smartly on the edge of the cupboard. What a commotion there was!

The news went around swiftly. 'The mouse has stolen from right under Captain's nose and used Cook's neck as a landing-stage!'

'It's no ordinary mouse,' whispered the sailors fearfully.

'Get me off the ship,' whimpered Cook. 'Put out a lifeboat! I'm not staying a moment longer. The mouse is out to get me, I know!' And he passed a trembling hand over his neck.





It was at that moment that Marco decided to make his entrance. Everyone stared in amazement as the cat stalked in, tail waving gently in the air, haughty and unafraid.

'It's the stowaway!' went up a whisper.

Marco sniffed at the ground with the air of a great detective.

'Just like Sherlock Holmes,' whispered someone in admiration.

Nose to the ground, Marco went through the hatchway, following the route that Mousie had taken. Ten minutes later he returned and laid a piece of toast at Cook's feet. Then, sitting down, he began to wash his face as though he had just had a most satisfying meal.

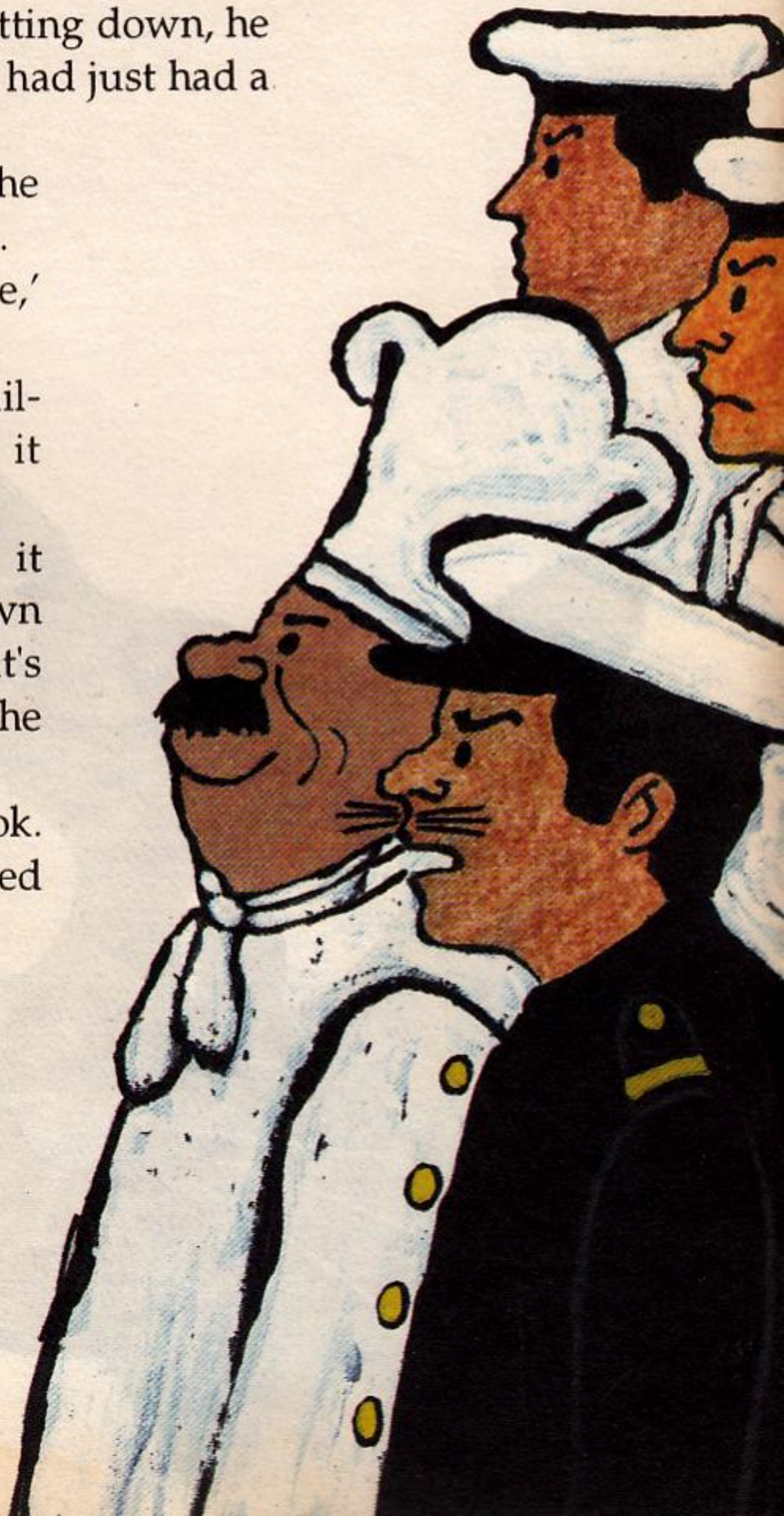
'He's caught it! He's caught the mouse!' cried Cook, hugging Marco.

'Caught it and ate it, looks like,' said a sailor.

'Well, Captain,' said a cheeky sailor. 'Shall I take it now and throw it overboard?'

Captain looked ashamed. 'Let it stay,' he said gruffly, bending down and stroking Marco. 'And see that it's well looked after for the rest of the journey!'

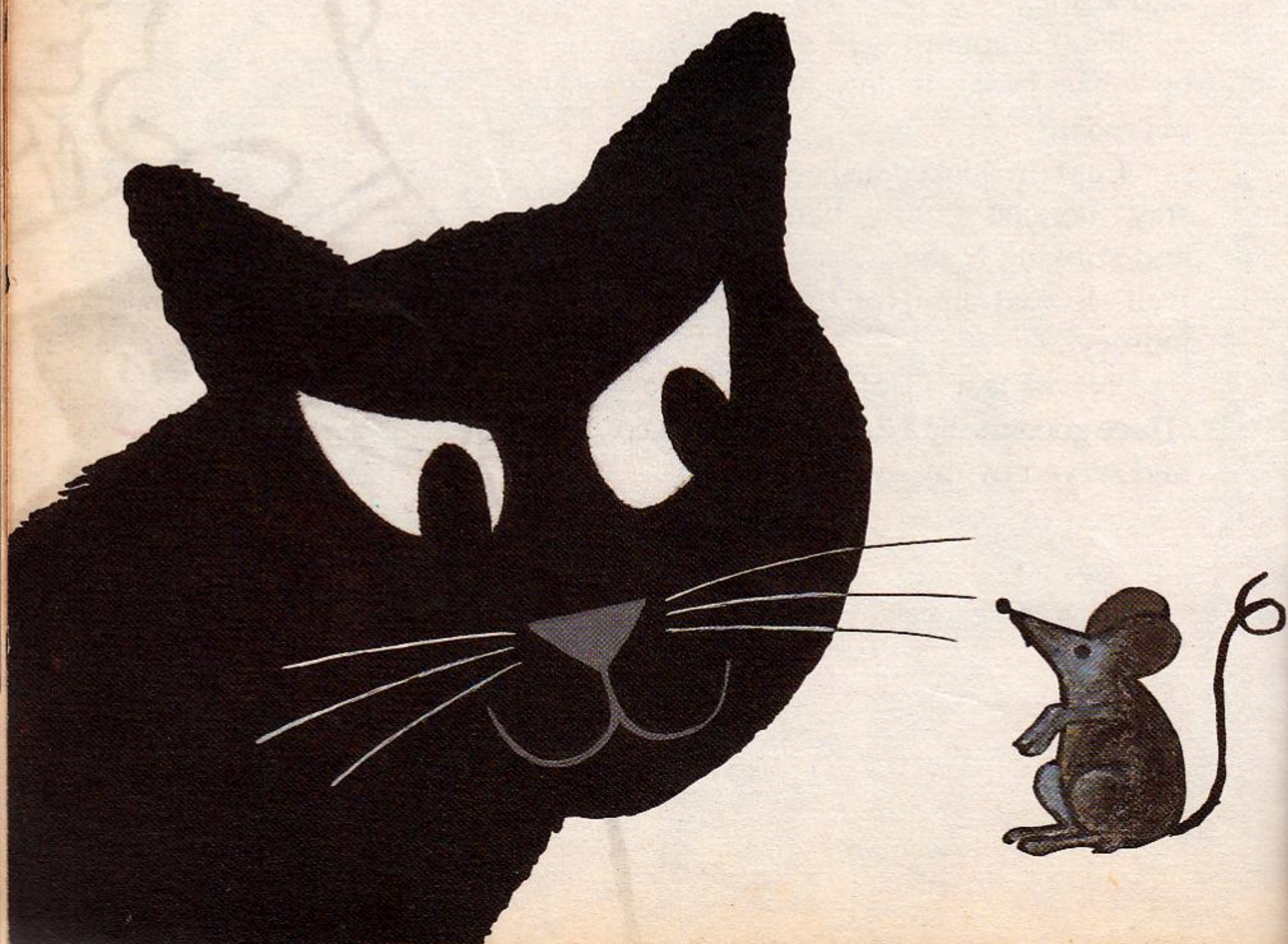
'Never fear, Captain,' said Cook. 'Three good meals a day it'll get, cooked and served by my own hands!'



Later that night, Marco visited the hiding place he no longer needed. A small creature came out of the shadows and eagerly accepted the piece of cheese Marco had brought for her. Then she rubbed herself against his leg.

'So you're no longer afraid of me, are you, Mousie?' said Marco.

The mouse looked at him cheekily. 'No, if you please, Mr Puss. For if you fall out with Cook or Captain, you'll be needing me again!'





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